

HOUSE BILL 485

By Lollar

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4,
Chapter 1, Part 3, relative to state symbols.

WHEREAS, the *Memphis Belle*, a Boeing B-17F Flying Fortress, is arguably one of the five most famous aircraft in United States history. She is ranked with the Wright Brothers' *Flyer*, Charles Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis*, the *Enola Gay*, and Chuck Yeager's *Bell X-1*. The *Memphis Belle* is designated a "National Historic Treasure" by the United States Air Force; and

WHEREAS, the Belle inspired two motion pictures: *Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress*, William Wyler's 1944 documentary, and a 1990 Hollywood feature film, *Memphis Belle*, produced by Mr. Wyler's daughter; and

WHEREAS, the *Memphis Belle* was delivered in September 1942, to the 91st Bomb Group, U.S. Army Air Corps, at Dow Field, Maine. She was deployed first to Scotland, then to her permanent base at Bassingbourn, England, on October 14, 1942. Lt. Robert K. Morgan and his crew of nine men flew twenty-five combat missions, all but four in the Belle, with the 324th Bomb Squadron, U.S. 8th Air Force. The *Memphis Belle* was one of the first Air Corps heavy bombers of World War II to complete twenty-five missions with only minor damage and without the loss of any crew member; and

WHEREAS, the airplane was named for pilot Robert K. Morgan's sweetheart, Memphis native Margaret Polk. The famous "Petty Girl" nose art on the plane was painted by the group artist of the 91st to depict Ms. Polk as the "*Memphis Belle*"; and

WHEREAS, following her 25th mission, and with salutations from the King of England at the Bassingbourn base, the *Memphis Belle* was flown back to the U.S. on June 8, 1943, by Lt. Morgan's crew. The airplane and crew subsequently visited thirty-two U.S. cities, including Memphis, on a war bond tour before the airplane was "retired" and sent to an airplane "bone

yard" in Altus, Oklahoma. In 1946, the *Memphis Belle* was "rescued" and brought to Memphis through the efforts of Mayor Walter Chandler. The airplane was placed on public display at various Memphis locations. Although not manufactured in Tennessee, the *Memphis Belle* spent fifty-nine years in the state under the care and watchful eyes of the *Memphis Belle* Memorial Association (MBMA); and

WHEREAS, in 2003, the *Memphis Belle* was moved to a hangar at the U.S. Navy Air Base in Millington, for restoration work under the auspices of many dedicated members of the MBMA. In October 2005, the *Belle* was taken by the U.S. Air Force to the National Museum of the United States Air Force (NMUSAF) at Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio. The *Memphis Belle* is being meticulously restored to pristine condition at the museum. The USAF and the MBMA are preparing for a week-long "roll-out" ceremony of the airplane in May 2018 – the 75th anniversary of the Belle's twenty-fifth mission over Nazi-occupied Europe. The celebration will be open to the general public and include political dignitaries from Tennessee and other states, USAF officials, and the MBMA. Once ensconced in the special "Strategic Bombing" display area of the NMUSAF, the *Memphis Belle* will be on permanent display for millions to see and learn about the history of the airplane, her crew, and the fight for freedom during the dark days of World War II; and

WHEREAS, the legacy and history of the *Memphis Belle*, her crew, and her namesake are enshrined forever in a monument erected by the MBMA in Veterans Plaza, Overton Park, in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, the iconic *Memphis Belle* and her crew are fitting symbols of the State of Tennessee, and a lasting tribute to those Tennesseans of the "Greatest Generation" who fought and died so that our state and our nation are today blessed with the freedoms and privileges we cherish; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4, Chapter 1, Part 3, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

The Boeing B-17F known as the *Memphis Belle* is designated as the official state airplane.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.